DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 712 EA 025 158

AUTHOR Berry, James E.
TITLE Redefining Roles for Shared Decision-Making: Organizational Leadership for School Systems.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference on Creating Quality Schools (2nd, Oklahoma City, OK, March 25-27, 1993).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Boards of Education; *Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Interprofessional Relationship; *Organizational Change; *Organizational Development; *Participative Decision Making; Principals; Superintendents; Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

Ways in which roles are being redefined as school systems move toward organizational structures based on shared decision making are described in this paper. Specifically, teachers need training to function as effective decision makers and principals must learn to be instructional facilitators. Principals acting as facilitators must possess skills in conflict resolution, communication, and group processes. The superintendent, as a facilitator of organizational change, has ultimate responsibility for coordination, implementing, and sustaining shared decision making. The board of education must support systemwide collaboration, develop guidelines, and exercise authority as a policymaker. A conclusion is that the implementation of shared decision making must encompass the entire organizational structure of a school district. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 360 712

Redefining Roles for Shared Decision-Making: Organizational Leadership for School Systems

James E. Berry
Department of Leadership & Counseling
Eastern Michigan University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Berry

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 025 158

REDEFINING ROLES FOR SHARED DECISION-MAKING

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Redefining Roles for Shared Decision-Making: Organizational Leadership for Systemic Change

Schools are being swept along by each succeeding wave of reform so that they will provide the best possible learning environment for children. Being held accountable for the educational success of children has created an urgency among school districts to re-evaluate aspects of school governance. The emerging roles for boards of education, superintendents, principals and teachers are being structured and defined by the organization in which they work.

Reform efforts have focused upon shared decision-making as an organizational solution to improve student learning. Since it is an unfamiliar form of school governance there is need for improving skills, abilities and behaviors in regard to changing roles and functions in areas for which boards of education, superintendents, principals and teachers have received little help or training.

Transforming Leadership in Shared Decision-Making School Systems

School buildings and the professionals in them are not independent islands of learning, but collaborative partners in educating children as they move through a dynamic and ever changing system. A decision made in one part of the system ripples through the entire system. The linking together of the many parts of the system in sharing responsibility for learning and system improvement is a fundamental shift occurring in school districts. This linking, known as shared decision-making or site based management, is leading to the alteration of leadership roles and responsibilities in school systems across the country.

As roles and responsibilities evolve the end result is the development of system wide leadership that enhances the entire decision-making of the organization. What occurs in a shared decision-making school system is a transformation from a centralized form of leadership to a decentralized form of leadership. Each group has responsibility to the other groups to form a collaborative leadership system. However, this occurs through the

development of a school system culture that values collaboration and team work. One of the goals of shared decision-making then, is to form and enhance this system of shared leadership. Shared decision-making is the process through which organizational leadership will occur.

As school districts move to shared decision-making as a form of school governance there is growing awareness that the people within school systems are unsure of what their roles should be in these shared decision-making school systems. As the move to shared decision-making accelerates there is the need to redefine the roles and responsibilities of every formal group within the organization so that the organization succeeds at becoming more efficient and effective.

Teachers as Decision-Makers

Government, business, education and the community have been advocates of change because of the need to improve educational results. Shared decision-making, as a member of a team, is the form of school governance that will impact how school districts move their organizations to higher levels of organizational achievement. Organizational teaming is a system wide commitment to working in collaborative groups which develop organizational procedures for making the teaming of personnel the primary source for making decisions and resolving issues of relevance to schooling. Organizational teaming will be the collaborative unit of school governance in school districts that adopt shared decision-making.

School district in-service that doesn't enhance the development of these collaborative teaming skills is ignoring the primary decision-making unit for improving the governance structure. It is the contribution of the whole that will bring about significant change within the school setting. The unit for initiating change, then, becomes the committees, groups or units of people who are bound together in order to achieve common goals.

In a collaborative school the teacher will be asked to contribute to the organization as well as to the development of

children. It is a changed school system that requires teachers to participate in school governance. Teachers must realize that the "traditional" role for them has changed and group participation must foster teacher leadership for improving organizational teamwork:

> Participation and leadership must be distributed among members. All should participate, and should be listened to. As leadership needs arise, members should all feel responsibility for meeting them. The equalization of participation and leadership makes certain that all members will be involved in the group's work, committed to implementing the group's decisions, and satisfied with their membership (D.W. Johnson & F.P. Johnson, 1982, p. 8).

The leadership role of the teacher is key for bringing about any form of change that will alter the way in which schools decide upon the curriculum, deliver instruction and set organizational priorities. This commitment by the teacher to the organization [italics] and to teaching has been glossed over in the restructuring debate. Teachers cannot ignore the added responsibility that they have as instructional/curricular leaders within a decentralized governing system. Teachers have a job that goes beyond teaching and learning. Teacher training programs, and school districts, must provide the knowledge and training that enhance skill development for teachers as instructional leaders and organizational leaders.

Providing the resources for teachers, in the real world of day-to-day work, is the practical shortcoming of organizing for shared decision-making. Shared decision-making means schools will have to re-examine their plans and goals in relation to personnel development and in carving time out of the school day for teachers to meet. The schedule may have as much to do with making the process operable as the decision and commitment to support it. There is no practical way to sustain shared decision-making without confronting the reality of the lack of training educators have in working in collaborative teams and in asking them to meet in these decision-making teams as an "add on" to the teacher's day. What is clear, however, is that if the teacher is to be a key participant in

instructional and curricular decisions the teacher must be recognized as a person shaping the organization as well as the child.

A teacher working in a school district committed to shared governance has increased commitment to:

* understanding and developing skills in the area of teacher leadership for instructional, curricular, and organizational improvement.
* consensus decision making, group dynamics, agenda setting, and conducting effective meetings.

The system that ignores the training requirements for teachers in the area of organizational teaming will find implementation of shared decision-making difficult. The difference in this training will be the difference between having teacher input or having teacher involvement in collaborative decision-making. Teachers, board members, and administration unfamiliar with this collaborative form of school governance will be hesitant to use it. Or, when it is adopted, it will not be utilized to its fullest measure when staff and administration are not confident working within a collaborative culture.

The Principal as Instructional Facilitator

As school districts move toward decentralization of decision-making the principal's leadership role will move beyond principal as instructional leader to that of building level facilitator responsible for bringing about instructional improvement. The principal was, and still is, the school manager. The principal was, and still is, the instructional leader. Now, however, as schools move toward the next wave of reform, the role of principal will be recognized as that of an organizational facilitator. The ability to work and collaborate with people will be a primary requirement of the position of principal. "With the democratization of organizations, especially schools, the leadership function becomes one of creating a 'community of shared values.'. . . The role of the principal will be changed to that of 'a leader of leaders,' rather than a leader of followers. Specifically, the principal will have to

develop his/her skills as coach, partner and cheerleader" (Lezotte, 1991).

The move to shared decision-making changes the process by which principals behave and interact with staff members. Human relations skills, coaching, collaboration, coordinating, and planning will become critical requirements of the position. Training programs have not focused upon these skills. Participating as a team member to make decisions changes the role of the principal and how the job is performed. Shared decision-making has become a process by which teams make decisions, but not in which teams, and principals, have skills. There is a redistribution of power, responsibility and accountability among those involved in the instructional/curricular program at the building level.

It is only through awareness and training that the principal will become proficient in this role. The principal that does not utilize the teaching staff as a resource is saddled with incomplete information for making instructional and organizational decisions. The role is not less as an instructional leader, it is more involved as a facilitator [italics] for meeting the goals and objectives of the building. The principals who serves as an instructional facilitator will need to learn and acquire the skills that will enhance his/her role as a conduit through which information passes between the various levels of the organization. The principal in this collaborative school will have requirements for:

* development of facilitative leadership skills for enhancing the collaborative relationships in a shared decision-making culture. (Role and responsibility descriptions will need to be developed and revised for specific schools and school districts.) Emphasis will be placed upon acquiring skills in conflict resolution, communication skills development, and group process training and development.

Superintendent as Facilitator of Organizational Change

There is no position in education that has as great a potential for reforming and restructuring schools as that of superintendent of

schools. The nationwide wave of reform eventually washes upon the desk of the superintendent. It is here that the meaning of reform must first take shape. The superintendent is the gatekeeper of school district change. The decision to move a school district toward shared decision-making is a top-down and bottom-up process that is initiated, in most cases at the top, by the superintendent. It is the superintendent who will guide organizational change as the district shifts to the collaborative structure for governing the school system. However, as a bottom-up process it is at the teacher level that it must take hold.

For the superintendent there is risk in choosing to go down the road of reform by trying to change the institutional culture from the traditional school bureaucracy to a collaborative culture. A conscious decision must be made to implement shared governance and then sustain it when problems with the process are encountered. Coordination of the district wide effort begins and ends in the superintendent's office.

Shared decision-making, because it is not typical as a governing process, has intuitive appeal to many. However, there are relatively few school districts that truly operate within a shared decision-making framework. Superintendents who take the lead in changing to this form of school district governance are in the minority. And, because of the unproven dimension of this approach there is risk in being the advocate for what may seem to be a process for "turning the keys of the district over to the teachers." The superintendent is a critical player for implementing shared decision-making and has to resolve the philosophical debate for him/herself concerning governance of the school system by including or excluding people in decision-making within the organization. By acting upon inclusion of personnel in collective decision-making the superintendent accepts responsibility for implementing a collaborative governance system.

The role of the superintendent in a collaborative governance system is parallel to the roles of the teacher and principal. The superintendent:

* is the district facilitator for coordinating, implementing and sustaining shared decision-making.
* has responsibility for guiding the district to agreed upon organizational parameters for the final "blueprint" that defines the shared decision-making governance structure.

The implementation of shared decision-making becomes an overriding legacy of the superintendent's tenure within the school district. For better or worse the changes wrought by shared decision-making are placed at the feet of the superintendent. Therefore, defining one's position as the focal point by which shared decision-making works within the system creates expectations for how one acts, responds and models collaboration. And, the burden of success or failure often rests with the superintendent's ability to guide the process through the maze of political debate and conflicting ideas. As the barometer of the organizational health of the school system, the superintendent holds ultimate responsibility for shared decision-making implementation.

Shared decision-making will increase the demands placed upon the position of superintendent to "walk" and "talk" the process of collaboration. There will be many who point out perceived, and in many cases legitimate, drawbacks to shared decision-making. However, addressing and overcoming these drawbacks will be the difference between supporting a failed change effort or succeeding with district wide implementation of shared governance.

Board of Education Responsibility for School Governance

The past one hundred years of public school governance (centralization of authority) has come under scrutiny for its questionable success in improving learning and achievement for children. The present system emanated from the industrial model in which "a small group of educated planners and supervisors [did] the thinking for the organization" (National Center on Education and the

Economy, 1990, p. 2). There is, today, a belief that implementation of shared decision-making will succeed in improving student achievement. Some fundamental belief statements that guide the shared decision-making process include:

- The power and authority to make decisions at the lowest possible level that they can be made is a condition of shared decision-making.
- Shared decision-making is people intensive. It involves a school district's constituents--board of education, principals, teachers, non-instructional staff, parents and, perhaps, students--as participants and as decision-makers.
- Shared decision-making demands an investment in the personal and professional development of people to ensure they have the best skills necessary for making the best decisions about schooling.
- Shared decision-making defines leadership as facilitative and collaborative. What emerges from collaborative decision-making is organizational leadership which has the potential for improving decisions about teaching, learning and the operation of a school system.

It is critical for a board of education to agree upon the overall merit of shared decision-making by "buying in" to these fundamental beliefs. The board of education, as a body, must support, and participate, in the efforts of the school system to function in this form of school governance. If the board does not agree upon the parameters for shared decision-making this hesitancy and ambiguity will be interpreted by staff and administration as a major roadblock to reform. This is a process that requires shared leadership as well as shared decision-making and each of the constituent groups must link together in order to work together. The board of education, as the governing body of the school district, must endorse system wide collaboration to send a clear message of approval to all the constituent groups.

The superintendent must initiate and sustain this effort as the school school board's chief operating officer, but the board of education must make a commitment to the superintendent, other administrators, teachers and the community that goes beyond traditional management/labor agreements. There must be a commitment to change how people operate within the school district bureaucracy. This also includes a redefinition of the role of the board of education member as well.

Decision-making, in this revised form of governance, is involvement of constituent groups--teachers, administrators, central office and the board of education--in organizational leadership. Participation becomes a sharing between constituent groups in resolving issues and concerns. It must be clearly understood by all parties that power and authority to make decisions will be spread throughout the organization. Accountability for those decisions will no longer rest solely with the administrative staff or board of education. Understanding and accepting this shift in leadership has impact upon the board of education because shared decision-making, as broad based decision-making, reinforces the role of the board member as a policy maker. Because broad based support is necessary for arriving at decisions within the school system there will be less of an opportunity for boards of education to become involved in the day-to-day school operation. Initiating shared decision-making requires the board of education member to:

* develop shared decision-making guidelines and parameters. This would include strategic planning and priority considerations for allocating school district resources.
* exercise authority as a policy maker in a system that values the contributions made by people within the school system. Organizing the system in this manner will place emphasis upon the board member as a coalition builder who works toward consensus decision-making.

"Regardless of how far a school gets [in its reform efforts], if it's not supported by the rest of the system, the whole ecology falls

apart" (Olson, 1992, p. 24). This system wide belief and culture sustains the entire governing process. However, it surely begins by distributing the power and authority once vested with the "educated planners and supervisors" to the empowered teachers, principals and staff members being asked to use judgment and make decisions. For this to happen, the board of education must have a vision and governance philosophy that is consistent with the educational community.

Summary

Because a school or school district adopts shared decision-making as a form of school governance, it does not necessarily follow that school personnel know how to function within the shared decision-making structure (Beer, Eisenstat & Spector, 1990, p. 160). It is in this recast form of interaction and governance that there is much to learn in the way of appropriate behavior. It is in this gray area that teachers and principals must operate, but in which they have been ill prepared.

Shared decision-making as a form of school governance will take shape in schools across the country in many ways. Its form will be unique to the features and characteristics of the people involved in implementation, the place, the problems encountered, and the success in teaming as a form of decision-making. The decision to decentralize authority will be fraught with frustration, dissension and, in some instances, outright failure.

As a legacy of the industrial revolution school leadership evolved from the principles defined by successful managers in successful corporations. Organizational roles were clearly defined by position. A board of education member, superintendent, principal and teacher knew what his or her charge was for educating children prior to this era of reform. The principles of scientific management utilized to improve industrial production were no less reliable in improving educational production . . . prior to the 1990's.
Times have changed, and so must the schools and the people who do the business of teaching in them and guiding them. Implementation

of shared decision-making must encompass the entire organizational structure within a school district in order to be truly successful.

The board of education, the superintendent, principals and teachers must accept the collaborative responsibility for performing as partners in the accomplishments--and failures--of meeting instructional, curricular and organizational goals. It becomes increasingly clear that all of the groups vested in teaching children must prepare for, and understand, the changing leadership roles and responsibilities in a school district utilizing shared decision-making as a form of school governance. The teacher, participating as a partner in school governance, must accept a share of the leadership role. The principal must learn the skills and abilities to lead as a partner with the teaching staff. The superintendent must support and encourage, with the aid of the board of education, the effort to redefine the governing structure of schools. It is through this restructured governing process that the school and the curriculum will change. However, It is through boards of education, superintendents, principals and teachers that true reform will take place because they will have linked together to establish a form of leadership that serves as the catalyst for transforming a school system. Organizational leadership is fast replacing the centralized form of leadership that was so identified with the traditional hierarchical organization. This form of leadership is a result of the collaborative culture that emanates from shared decision-making.

References

Beer, M., Eisenstat, R. A., & Spector, B. (1990, November-December). Why change programs don't produce change. Harvard Business Review., pp. 158-166.

Johnson, David W. and Johnson, Frank P. (1982) Joining together group theory and group skills. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc.

Lezotte, L. W. (1991, June). Effective schools the second generation. Paper presented at the meeting of Effective Schools, East Lansing, MI.

National Center on Education and the Economy. (1990). America's choice: High skills or low wages! Rochester, NY: National Center on Education and the Economy, Executive Summary.

Olson, Lynn. (1992, March 11). Florida district vows to infuse quality principles into schools. Educational Week XI, No. 25, p. 24.